Nothing Happened and Besides I Wasn't There

spite flirting with impasse

How to track down ills

Foods, odors, molds, pets may cause wide variety of aches and disabilities

What's an effective dose of aspirin?

discovery is a monster

elbows its way to the top

as the race heats up

Is it an outside problem?

A fiancee long

Made into the spotlight

WILL' Post

For those who survive

experts suggest fighting back as best remedy

An aphrodisiac idea

It's bootstrap time, so let's get to it

Mark Wallace

Nothing Happened and Besides I Wasn't There

Mark Wallace

EDGE

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Every Day Is Most Of My Time (Texture Press, 1994)
The Sponge Has Holes (Tailspin Press, 1994)
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Nothing Happened and Besides I Wasn't There

"I also have a problem with repetition—saying things more than once."

– *student paper*

But nothing ever begins. Is this the line

for accidental death insurance? Maybe my special talent

is pumping gas. You've got no future

but at least the present is boring you silly.

Here comes Mr. Panic Attack. Institutional advancement

left everyone behind. In the confessional

Dave looked for a spittoon. Either you're under the wheels of a truck

or your singing voice is uniquely painful.
In the year 2000, going to work

will still suck. Around here, not even a blizzard
can stop the harness races. Outrageous sonic impact

or an overpriced CD? Let's dye our hair
and watch resistance crumble. Hey, great ambient party.

Somebody said there'd be video games.
We've progressed past Progress. That bigger paycheck

sure makes it tempting to subvert democracy.
I'll give you a pizza parlor and two tech firms

for one misleading spiritual experience. The quagmire
doesn't tell the story to the quandary. Buckup buttercup

bonanza. Would you prefer a cure
or a manicure? Honestly I'm in doubt
about my honesty so I lose

everything I steal. I could teach you to understand
modern art in two hours but I don't know
what I don't like. Was the aroma intoxicating

or toxic? He may abuse foreign labor, but all he ever wanted
was to feel good about himself.
One time I really did speak from the heart

and everyone went away. Now I practice
playing darts. Now I feel like going home
much earlier in the day. You wanna get personal with me

you better be ready to talk business.
If one train leaves Chicago at seventy miles an hour
and another leaves New York doing fifty-five,

how many politicians does it take
to screw in a light bulb? How many points of light
does it take to screw a politician?

Nothing happened and besides
I wasn't there. Economic malcontents
make lousy slaves. Please.

It's amazing the pressures the mind can manufacture
after days of interrogation. What a great anti-bacterial soap!
When I realized that living was impossible
my life got easier. When I lived by realizing the impossible

I didn't go to work anymore. These French police are always
so much better read. This many clearance sales at once
makes me pretty suspicious.
For the first time in his life it seemed smarter to give up.

I wanted to write a book of insincere poems but after awhile
the project seemed too sincere. Here comes another train
loaded with cultural baggage. I've forgotten
how much I've forgotten. Break on through to the other

thoughts you shouldn't be having.
After three years of heady misunderstanding
they finally agreed never to have known each other.
He what? And then she? I drowned

in the typing pool. I've got seat 108
and room 108 and 108 years
plus life. Anywhere you dip in
you can still get soaked. First I imitate everyone then I
get misunderstood. But seriously it's not like I do this

strange dance for every owner who comes down the parkway
of malicious avarice. Some place in this room sits a future
blowhard. I felt relieved but not present. The balance
is off its beam. Long after I went to hell
I was still here. She wanted to detonate the orders

of angels with their plastic straws, who were sucking up
whatever was left in the people. The explanation was better
than the poem. The nail was better than the poem
for want of which the explanation was lost. Boo Hoo.
The death dealing rulers of the biosphere

overcame the heavenly twins. I'll conclude by starting again.
He went to the bathroom of labyrinths.
Let's see if I can find where you left me when I left myself.
Lately the only adjective I use is
fundamentally. I'm not saying you shouldn't be open to risk

but five aces raised some eyebrows.
The streets were fundamentally barren. He slapped me
fundamentally. To use the word fundamentally
is fundamentally mistaken. Please lift that weight
back onto my shoulders. Content is narcissism. Long ago

none of us were here. If answers are answers
whether you have questions or not, is another question
a better answer to a question than an answer?
Three Ph.D.'s and still flipping burgers. Say we accept
that it's better to be right than sorry, does it follow

that soap will get your conscience cleaner
than starting all over again? You can't handle the truth.
I can't handle the truth. I'd rather be chased
by boatloads of sinister Scandinavians and their bear Xerxes
than have to prove I exist. Would you like

social angst on those fries? She wanted to question assumptions,
now people assume she's out to get them. Let's kill two stones
with one bird. Here comes another dinosaur
who learned to innovate. Thank you don't
mention it. Lately with some drops of an obscure fluid

who calls himself Stan. My entire life
has been filler. The best of dimes, the worst of dimes.
Misuse the word "poignant."
I'm in love with your artificial additives
and the sexy way your lips pucker when you say

"I'm so angry I can't shit." I didn't know he was going
to whimper softly like that. Later, after apple-picking time,
the whole county packed up and moved, determined to pretend
it had never existed. Conventional melancholy
walked to the top of the hill, and looking down on Venice,

quickly became conventional transcendence. The gas bill.
It's poetry's version of a Hollywood thriller, no content
but lots of fun on your way to psychic oblivion.
How many contradictory commands does it take
to screw a subordinate? Isn't it a little hot
for all that combat gear? This line was added only to fill space.

Never let it be said that I didn't do
the least I could do. They rolled on the floor and barked like dogs,
convinced by an insight they later couldn't explain.
Nothing on the outside and the inside's empty too.
Picture this: it's ten degrees out and you've stolen a Christmas tree
and are seized by a desire to confess.

Random urges to destroy my reputation
by doing something utterly uncouth, like shitting in public
or burping in my boss's face, actually made my day more bearable.
You may be clever but he's still the tail
that's wagging the dog. It's harder to listen
than to shut up. How many three-day drunks does it take

to give you a better perspective? Insular mind games.
I'm imitating something that doesn't exist.
I'm existing in something that always imitates.
Existing is something that doesn't always imitate I.
My visceral reaction is to see the word torture
painted on everything. Paper owns my apartment

and I'm in its way. Politics distracts me from everything
I ever wanted to lie about. Excessive contrapuntal ornamentation
ain't all it's cracked up to be. Writing occurs
at the moment paranoia becomes total, sense of being watched
by an indeterminant lack of purpose, punctuated

by bread and circuses. Say what you mean?
I may be lonely, but I'd rather be by myself
than dropped in pits of earnest direction.
One good turn deserves another business opportunity.
It's not too late to fall apart. The shouts in the alley

don't know you're listening. The unexamined life
can get you right to the top. If three and three equalled seven
I'd be a mathematical genius. After Jason dumped Lisa
and Reggie crashed his plane in the Andes
and Julian discovered Brendan in bed with Hope

my life made more sense, at least it seemed that way
until I got up from the chair. I'm less like myself
than possible. Don't forget to multiply your face.
Nothing I do makes me any less afraid.
My life is so ruined that I enjoy it immensely.

Half in the room, half out, half under the doorway
and half off to the left, why not wait forever
for the guests who won't be arriving, why not die repeatedly?
What's wrong with you that you can't eat your heart out?
I had a purely aesthetic moment in 1987

and began selling cars. No. Without all these pronouns
you wouldn't have to listen to me. How many sores
does it take before you realize that the freeway
isn't good for your feet? This has got to stop.
Amazing how quickly potential becomes

6/7/92

Battling insects, one at a time

Another look back at the greedy '80s

What's wrong with me?

Tough questions for you

Blame focuses

control over employees in 'mode of living' pacts

"We're not talking about free speech here.

High-profile men lead the way

on verge of falling apart

Joke reveals a serious problem

Clever and funny could be too frank for some

Why fear biotech food?

it's not so radical

Keep cooking your 'specialty'

the pit you have to dig yourself out of. Reverb.
Ten trucks loaded with cheese sandwiches and I'm in a pickle.
I've got a crush on the Pillsbury dough boy.
Just when John became certain that his life
would never have meaning again, the doorbell rang

and two waiters in Hawaiian shirts offered him the chance
to believe in his future. Refusing the cash and car
she chose curtain number three, and found herself in a mutable space,
negotiating the margins of ordinary material reality
and able to hear music with a new intensity.

Don't play that flute, pass me the garbage lids.
One. Every day began to seem alike.
Which do you prefer, nameless fear or knowing your enemies?
Tell me something I don't know. How many overachievers
does it take to glut America's med schools?

Listen to me, sermonizing again. If I thought you had what it takes
I'd take it from you. He's just that kind of mirror image.
Over and over and over and over and over and over
and over. Calculated insufficiency. All he wants is his fair

market value. At this point the only innovation remaining in poetry
would be to perform Italian sonnets without irony
during business hours. I'm doing this
to prove I don't want to. I'm wanting this

to prove I don't do it. Here comes the unavoidable but.
Struck suddenly by the thought that nothing in his life
had ever made sense, Stanley left his body for another plane,
hovering above wheat fields like a cloud of hazardous waste,

vowing to win re-election. She felt hurt
that no one had ever understood her need to replicate
standard forms of long division in her thinking
about current social problems. I'm a group, not an individual

and all these individuals don't seem to like me.
It's not enough to be confused, you've got to really want it.
I don't believe in authors or audiences, but I hate being booed.
Tacoma's terrorist tennis tournament. Calculus never reaches zero

except in my neighborhood. He proposed
but all he could promise me was his aggressive demise.
Falling down the escalator, Joanne kept her eyes open
and suddenly understood what it was like

to be an artist in America. If I forgot to mention.
I saw God yesterday and today I'm bored.
You asked for it. Don't organize a dissident party,

cry for help. I live for the thrill
of jury duty. Why was everyone insulted when I said
I wanted to take over the world? Some people are never satisfied

with the shit we feed them. In the mailman's apartment
they discovered many dead cockatoos and hundreds of pieces
of undelivered mail. The CIA is here to help.

Guy Debord committed suicide last week, but it doesn't matter
because you don't know who he is, or if you do,
you don't matter. Is it better to be underhanded,

insidious, or redundant? I'm doing things that have no name
but I can be arrested for them. Who are you trying to kid?
If one hat is on your head and another in your hands. I remember

things that never happened. I overthrew a third world country
and all I got was this lousy resentment. Why say something once
when you can say it again. How many mistakes

does it take to make things interesting? New red shoes.
Yesterday you were just yourself,

today you're an ad for higher education. I never meant
to miss the point, but now that I have,

it makes me special. The mimes
proved no one else had a voice either.

What do you do after you've met every demand?
Can you tell me how to get to the shopping mall?

I've got nothing against the wind, but I want my clothes back.

I can't believe you believed I believed it.

How many accents are there in Mississippi? I had to shoot

my sources and then my horses, then I killed

two KKK's with one AKA. I was wrong all right.

It's all in how you fail to say it. He had no information

but the way he avoided our questions was fascinating.

If everything interests you, you're still leaving something out.
Growing up in a concentration camp has made me feel at home
everywhere I go. What can a poet know
but parting, that the ground no longer trusts us.

Thirty-seven ways to be someone else.
The weather changed abruptly, but the weatherman

still had a role to play. I used to be in love,
now I watch my back. Once you start thinking about it
your best odds seem at the races. I don't like that
but no one asked me. How far is it to somewhere

completely different? Don't point that thing
at my obsequious psychodramas. It's easier to lose

when you're snoozing, and I get lots of sleep.
Negotiating the complex boundaries of every mistake I made,

I began to believe the universe was solely my fault.
I didn't think you meant it when you said

you had no idea who I was, then I realized
I was someone else. Last week three people called me

looking for somebody with my name;
one asked me how the party was, one asked if I was black,

and the third threatened to repossess my boat.
Everyone came to my pity party. Did we have an argument
or a discussion or a fight? Assuming for the moment

that nothing can be assumed, I have no idea
what I'm talking about. We could be wrong more interestingly.
So I said to him well if you feel that way, I'll just take

my knife out of your back. His point was correct
but not important. Encased in glass, the weight-lifting center
left the accountants exposed within, but your reaction to this

may be subjective. Every time I fall down the stairs
I make a profit. How many bad marriages does it take
to change the terms of obsession? The sun set and I still hadn't
gotten out of town. Make a list of people you know

who don't know what they're doing. It's hard to get a fair deal
here at the fair. If I'd known I was going to be this lost
I would have resolved to enjoy it. A word of warning.
I have to schedule a time

to fill out my schedule book. That's not my wife,
that's an extension of my ego. The Abominable Snowjob.
I stored myself among knickknacks and dice games,
refundable misnomers, erratic reflections of love on the run,

calamitous excreble denominations of dog-tired
despondency, then I began to understand
pointless ambiguity. Nothing's as worthwhile as it seems.
Torn between two impossible positions, he made the obvious decision

to act as if everything was okay. Two kilos of computer memory
and I still don't recall who you are. Famous last words:
I'm glad that's over. A Ph.D. in social change
and no quarters for the parking meter. The implied criticisms

in this poem are turning against me.
Don't shoot, open an IRA account.
I'm not trying to be funny, I'm trying to destroy
everything I've worked for. Take ten of your most cherished

assumptions, display them in your living room
and see how people react. I'm not sure this poem likes you
but it knows more about me than I would like.
Poetry may not be about advancement

but I'm going nowhere awfully fast. Too late to stop
getting everything wrong. If I'm mean to you, will you consider it
evidence of my superior status? Postures of dominance
and submission, or that dog just peed all over my leg.

I want my words to put my life at risk, but that doesn't mean
I'm happy he wants to kill me. If money is the ground of everything
it's no wonder I'm up in the air. Everybody goes to Harvard
and here I am, going to the dogs. Nothing's ever imperfect.

If verb tenses shape our sense of time, then at least
when you don't show up it's not universal. Perversion
perspires, conspiracy coagulates. It's all in how you seize it.
If I never do anything original again, maybe the entrepreneurs

won't have to reproduce me. Maybe isn't good enough
but it's all we've got. How many pages will it take
to write your life story? What if I don't want
to ask questions? Let's assume that nothing changes
and see what changes. I'm addicted to reasons.

They're making out like bandaids. Sure I'm foolish
but that doesn't mean the sky isn't falling.
Which of the following is more likely to control you:
multinational corporations, Bolivian druglords,
federal bureaucracy, personal arrogance, narrow agendas,

internal contradictions you act out unconsciously,
or do all these things seem the same? Gary, Indiana and
Indiana Jones. Your ideology can't control its bladder.
For years he had done nothing, which cemented his reputation.
Which do you prefer, parataxis or Frank Sinatra's "My Way"?

I'm not doing anything that hasn't been done before, and it didn't
work then either. I can be more derivative than you.
Sometimes I think I'm going to be great, sometimes I think
I'm going to be forgotten, sometimes I think
that these are the same. I don't want to write about myself.

He said you hated nihilism so much
because you were tempted to accept it, while he could laugh
at nothingness because he was a blissful romantic idiot.
Would you call homelessness a lifestyle?
How many Pizza orders does it take

to keep Domino's in charge? People trying
to make a career through literature understand
exactly what this poem is about. I used to have sex,
now I just have irony, and the irony is
I like sex better. All the doors won't open in Aberdeen.

You've lost your job, but at least the company is competitive.
He was facile in every direction. I think the avant garde
is going to change the world, but then again
I voted for Jerry Brown. Furious, ironic, hilarious
or just another public relations ploy? I'm uncomfortable with the idea

that art changes nothing, I'm uncomfortable with the idea
that art changes something. Look: it's the punk and the hippie
fighting about who's more redundant. Put your mask back on.
Sure I called him a bastard, but I didn't think he'd get mad.
Millionaire mathematician seeks girl, and a better lie than this one.
What's it like to be statistically significant?

Let's say I forget to work on this poem,
let's say cheap tricks are the only ones we have,
let's say for the moment that we'll say we're getting along,
then at what point does it seem that defining how
all this makes a difference will do any more than fill our evenings?
I'm funnier when I'm bitter. You've been laughing so hard for so long

3/16/98

Hit by the doubting disorder

Remembering a week of dinners, each with its repellent charm

brings disease into public forum

The answer to why Johnny and Jane can't

violent crime

to play key roles
mental changes

lice brass facing rise

"Basically, it's a difficult disorder to treat. It tends to be rather resistant

wider war on elm leaf beetles

radiates love and a natural command

Obsessive: Victims get panicky

limits

are they wise?

ruin?

be wary of 'fixes'

stuck to the roof of your mouth for three days. If, that is, you actually ate it.

Treasures amid the debris

advance to 'Big Dance'

you're out of a job. A direct critique of direct critique
cost me most of my friends. Hearing that Picasso had died
Julian opened a boutique. The only thing worse than the bourgeoisie
is the fact that I'm one of them. The center of any group
probably has a malicious expression. You may think you have a past
but wait until you're really wasting time. Don't cry for me

Argentina. Dance little sister dance. The hills are alive
with the sound of Muzak. How many terrorists does it take
to justify illegal government operations? Seriously
I can't be serious, but you annoy me anyway.
This poem is more hostile than me. You may not want
to understand what I'm saying. That's not blood you're slipping in,

that's my financial history. He wanted me to date her
so he could see her more often. If you never answer the phone,
does that mean no one's called? If you drop the phone
and it doesn't make any sound, are you in a forest?
Last night I heard a baby crying.
This is a sonnet. Seriously John, take your pencil

out of my life. I'll have the green pills on the left.
I'm much more in love than I thought could ever happen
but then again, I voted for Jerry Brown. Well someone's got to do
all that mean stuff. Party with me punker.
Please mistake me. I may be humiliated
but at least I'm not bored. Don't take any wooden nickels.

I said cows think, I never said they think things through.
His common sense went flying out the window
and they took his wallet too. The trickle down theory of violence:
if there's a lot at the top, there'll be a lot at the bottom.
Do you think that ignorance is here to stay, or is it more likely
that facts are being withheld? Indebted to the sanctity of blather.

Congratulations, you've been pre-approved
for a credit card. What makes a good deal good?
Love may not last but my trash is overflowing.
Don't doubt the data, Dan. I was once called cynical
for saying that everyone doesn't live to make a profit.
You can complain all you want but you're not on the board.

According to one article I read, the United States
meets one of four criteria necessary
to be a representative democracy. It's a great day
to buy new shoes, but changing your life will have to wait.
Is it my turn to be tied to the tracks?
A door in your left side... oh forget it.

Spontaneous uprisings occurred all over the residency program.
My name forgot my number, and nobody will let me in.
The person in the next car could be you, but it's not.
Be a patient patient. Overcome by contradiction,
he began to walk at night on the freeways, miraculously avoiding

the bland repetition of traffic. I want to talk politics
but my opponent keeps having me arrested.
A dram of mead is worth an ounce of prevention
and anyway I'm all alone in this oven. Whoever said life was not
about having fun? You may have paid your dues

but I've paid my bills. No one knew the name
of the white stuff in the hall. This is as easy
as it looks. Say cheese. She was given the burden of proof
then we went to lunch. I used to want to be the best,
now I'm trying not to get hit. Another great poem gone to shit.

Noble causes and sinister underbellies
met at their common watering hole.
"Poetry is a revolutionary act," said the establishment.
I may not be here, but neither are you. How long can I keep
wasting my time? It's hard to be sorry

so I'd rather blame the other guy. After all I'm done for you.
A hundred ways to cover your tracks. The administration
has accepted a resolution regarding the accommodation
of religiously observant fish and foul.
I want my voice to be heard, but then again

I voted for Jerry Brown. He who escapes the past
is one lucky son-of-a-bitch. Love hurts.
Stop stepping on my face.
The moment I lost my creative potential

I began writing poetry. Been down so long
it looks like technocracy to me. Please put this away now.
Inside the holograph, he was curled in a foetal position.
Give me one good reason. Poised on the edge of new universes

Jane sought the comfort of psychoanalysis. I've done less
than nothing. She's not sure how she feels.
Would you rather hold the camera
or have your picture taken? Whose duty is it

to pick up the pieces? When was the last time
you meant what you said? Try to go a whole day
without making any pronouncements. Suddenly he dispersed.
How many more midstreams? I'm so bored with this

that I can't stop. Make your life longer than anyone can stand.
Because he feared that he would lose everything
he tried to remain detached. The field of deference.

Just line your butts up in a row so I can kiss them all at once
and get the hell out of here. Which parts are you sure of?
Wall Mart and K-Mart. Fifty pieces of information

on every consumer in each requested zip code.
Closure and Resolution wanted to fall in love
but each was already committed.

Is that a tone poem or a computer account?
Stop raining on my parody.
The difference between successful humor and bad taste

is my friend Marty. He branched out into other areas
to try new ways of falling short.
Can you believe they towed my car away

for only twenty unpaid parking tickets? I don't want to fight
but you're a real asshole. Arrogance alone won't get you ahead,

you've also got to lack talent. Coming home towards dawn,
he developed the habit of smashing his clocks.

Last night I thought a lot
about my past, my friends, my relationship with you

and the French revolution. Don't call me at home,
use the garbage can. History = heads will roll.

One more way to misread the data. 365 holidays a year.
I can't tell you how many things I don't pay attention to.

Would you call me paranoid if I said my pen
ran out when I finally had something to say?

Revolution will happen on the level of consciousness, but then again
I voted for Jerry Brown. How many redundant remarks

does it take to become a spectacle? That's a lovely hat
you're stepping on. The problem with saying "I want you to hurt me"

is that it makes me like everyone else. Keep dope alive.

It's not too late to be too late. The next station

never got here. How many people can I alienate tonight?

Will you please feed the fish? He had a commanding view
of frustration. What she needed was a nice little tea ceremony

with mainstream Buddhists. A non-stop flight
to third world countries oppressed by your dollar. I tried to take up

jogging. When on the subway, are you more likely
to read a newspaper, or stare surreptitiously at others?

The deduction was logical and wrong. On the one hand
but not on the other. From the moment he crushed John's skull

he knew it would be a rotten Monday. I think of the spray
as a way to break them down, then you put out powder

and poison them to kingdom come. A picture of my face
is wearing a suit. He just has one hit single

but he keeps having it all over again. My phone's not ringing,
that's my head. The amount of abuse you will accept
is the amount you will receive. The ratio of jokes to morons.

My bosses have no use for me
but they'll still put me to use. How many dominant ideologies
does it take to get to work on time? Social phenomena, or

the story of our litter box. I'm not as fed up
as I might be, and that's not saying much. The mail may turn
into your enemy. My watch is right, what's wrong

is my whole conception of time. If I started showering
would you love me again? It ain't over
until you really feel like shit. Riding the subway

long after reasonable people would be dead. Unreadable texts
will never make a difference, he said, but does that mean
that nothing is readable? This sentence no more resists dissolution

than the rats I know are fond of cheese. I'm sorry you've ruined
your life, but I'm too busy ruining mine. What don't you believe?
If human relationships are impossible, then it's not him

but metaphysics she hates. And besides the premise is faulty.
Don't be too quick to know what you're doing. Shouting
at street signs. I wouldn't worry so much about my own self-interest

if I wasn't so afraid of yours. The whole time he was talking
all she could see was the way his mouth moved. A fish
who doesn't recognize who feeds him. The Texas Chainsaw Massacre
is just another art flick. I keep looking for evil

but all I turn up is moralists. I don't know how to get there
but I'm not going. You've just begged another man to take you back
and you wonder why I'm feeling cautious.
Mass produced hysteria and three cinnamon sticks.

They're boiling me in oil, and I only wanted a little fun.
This sentence has seventeen potential meanings.
He may have robbed your house, but at least he didn't lie about it.
If sincerity is a problem, then my dissembling

6/91

Something funny happened on the way to hanging

Harassment and the need to get along

share real-life horror tales

feeling 'thoroughly dominated'

Random killing blurs boundaries jars residents

Childhood hangout becomes business

sin reassures

Says 'single authority' will take control of all

expects profits from its new jail

'go to the wall'

'Earth-friendly' claims

have doubters crying foul

may be the last refuge of an honest man. Buy for now.
What's all this about babies and bathwater?
One nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice
at the mall. Everything's coming up poses. These witty puns

are meant to reveal my cultural insight. I may hate myself
but I don't like you either. Love conquers all, but then again
I voted for Jerry Brown. Which of the following do you fear most:
growing old, growing fat, or finding you have nothing to say?

The last stop was two stops back. Sometimes a cigar is just
an object of interpretation. I know what you're saying
but are you talking to me? There's more than two ways to skin
a vocal group of oppressed middle managers. It was a lovely little

public housing project. If you're reading this,
I'm no longer writing it, but I'm thinking about your reading it
as I'm here writing it. Rhythm, cadence, tone, style, form:
the more I study these terms, the less I understand them.
If you're pissing in the wind, I must be the wind.

Personality is a social performance. He wanted to be great
and she wanted to be funny, and so the opposite was true.
That's some busted kneecap. Don't let's not do this over again.
Would you please stop sucking my blood? I'm fed up

with being fed up. Well if I've repeated myself then
I've repeated myself. Is the opposite of living on the margins
being in the way? How many Main Streets
does it take to give you deja vu? If I said I was
contradictory, impure, full of doubt, insecure and egotistical

would you still love me? Find the hidden self-promotion
in the previous sentence. He used to be a work of art,
now he's just a theory. The bombed-out buildings are telling me
we're not going to have that cup of coffee. She doesn't meet
arrogant dickheads like him every day. If this poem talks

a lot about people, does that mean it isn't
structural critique? The food between my teeth
was the last I saw of my friend John. When you say
you're going to take a stand, do you mean
a hot dog stand? But hey, there's always compromise.

He's learning to like himself.
What happens when they won't even let you
do what *they* want? I don't have a self
to be a parody of. Every time I write
another of these stupid lines, I think about

all the great poems I'm not working on.
I've been in this much pain before, but that doesn't mean
I'm getting used to it. Don't tell me about your problems,
make them mine. Congratulations on making it big: don't worry,
it wasn't your fault. Does my face look fat?

I'm getting a phone call at ten-thirty that's going to send me
ballistic in any number of directions. I suppose by now
you're expecting me to try to be funny. Baboons put their butts
in the air. The best lovers visit once a week, and bring groceries.
I'm heading for the low ground. I write in aphorisms

because I've got no time to be interesting. I love the way birds
shit from these trees. Freedom's just another word
for something we don't have around here. I'm not sure.
Did you say "twisting and serving frozen knowledge"
or "frozen yogurt"? I write this way because I want to make statements

and know I can't, but don't want to make statements
even if I could. Somebody's always telling me how fluid they are
then they spray the stuff all over me.
I started speaking like an authority a long time ago
so I do everything I can to make sure I hate myself.

All I ever wanted was to be funny
in the voice of seriousness. Hey, strike me in the pants.
When my friend Joe woke up this morning
he thought he was Willa Cather. States of mind
or states of residency. I'm more than confused,

I'm out of order. The human animal doesn't think
but does feel fear when isolated. I have mixed feelings
about Leonard Cohen. Is that non-existent in the U.S.?
In the dream I was hanging on the side of a cliff
thinking about you. Anxiety occurs in the feet, or

my boots are too tight for this friendship. Make a list
of things you don't care about. The way of all violated flesh
took a detour. That's not funny, that's my life.
The lack of anything resembling the poetic. Don't.
There are lots of names to call me, so please take your time.
I don't just want to win, I want to be totally reckless.

If I told you I was suicidal, could I get you
to stay away? To some people, everything is obvious
but not to me. My whole life I've been running
for good reason. Of course it's going to work out;
I've got my bus ticket. I know reading tired
of you're this by now. Sometimes cigars are just

symbols that the unconscious is like a language.
Which do you prefer, Foucault or the fox trot?
A more profound poem than this would say that creative acts
emerge from the dissatisfaction that makes us human.
Sure I'm afraid of death; why do you think
I fantasize about it? Maybe she can change him.

He likes a good time as much as the next guy, but this is war.
If I'm thumbing my nose at decent people, at least that's better
than wiping it on them. Just when I lose faith in the political system
along comes a man like Bob Dole.
Most of the lines in this poem are stolen from people
smarter than me, but at least I'm well read.

Let's try the back door. Hey, don't laugh at my inner child.
Fine, we'll talk philosophy, but first take out that chaw.
Job security is being eliminated across the U.S., but don't worry,
you'll be the first to know. My madness is strategic,
his strategy is madness. I figure if I play the fool

that takes the pressure off you. Serve yourself, I always do.
Do you blame people or institutions? Have you tried
the spicy mustard? Totalitarianism; evil, or just another lifestyle?
I write long poems to get the runner's high.
Don't mistake me: I'm every bit this annoying in person.

All this respect for other people has gone too far.
Make a case for the relation between your life
and Chinese finger puzzles. How many dead ends does it take
to get to the church on time? Convinced on an emotional level
I ran right into the path of the truck. Burn baby burn, disco inferno

gets you a rebate in Fresno. I'm charmed by the witty insouciance
of this little class war. Poetry; real delinquency
or just a phase? Did you say arrested development
or arrested developers? For years I kept in my office desk
a pair of big red wax lips. Discuss the links between

guerilla warfare, dating, and the IRS. Seized by desperate fervor
he attempted to ban the individual. At some point in this poem
I'm going to take both sides of every question.
According to differential calculus, his despair can never reach
absolute zero, but can only approach it as a limit.

Let's say there's no basis for her fears, still the hookers
outside my window are too damn noisy. My landlord
is so conservative he won't even let me do
a little welding. The system and its rebels;
necessary mutual counterpoint, or binary waste of time?

The pizza was lousy so they shot the delivery guy.
Why don't you love me when I talk about Stalin?
Try our new sandwich called "Pigs In Shit."
Which do you prefer, paranoia or shallow sarcasm?

I wrote the last sentence with a cramp in my foot.
Diversify one of the following: your culture or your investments.
When worse comes to worst, be happy. I want this poem
to be about beauty; why have I left me bereft?

I'm the middle ground. Long after the dogs have gone home
there's not much to do around here. Do I seem submissive?
Tentacles, tactics, or tambourines? He's an embarrassment
to his image of himself. Is that my dreams misfiring

or is this a weapons silo? List your ten favorite ways
to misuse others. "You've got mighty big nostrils,"
he said in an attempt to flatter his boss. Why just stand there
when you could fuck up everything? Maybe what we need

are better retirement plans. Please don't park that boat
on my tent. Sure, day passes into night,
but I don't have the copyright. They've tied down my minister.

Either you get giddy when you talk to me
or that's not fluoride in this water.
He hung a busy signal on his forehead. Ghost ships

of middle managers, bartenders, and repeated demands.
The whole thing backward ended up. When I say it's a cheap trick
I mean I admire it. It's not too late to inject this caffeine.

How many organizations should declare themselves irrelevant?
Emotional bankruptcy drove me to emotional accountants.
I don't want perfection, I want you out of here.

The stanza breaks in this poem are arbitrary
and without significance. If we take the short cut
maybe we'll never get there. Looking like a plate of bacon and eggs,

Jason strolled through the mini-mall, noticing
the old people and pretty girls, thinking about his insurance
and several failed marriages, wondering where his promise went,

and suddenly he decided to buy a Buick
and tour the suburbs with desperate glee. Don't read my work closely,
flatter me. Someone was killed in the lion cage at the D.C. zoo

and someone on a talk show killed another guest after the show
in the same week; don't you see a link? The profundity
of flies in the ointment. Look at the greasy coating.

10/5/92

never too soon to start cooking

sex with death

shows
Americans how to eat

PHANTOM PHONE

Author: Telling all
he knows
about
Many

offers
no apologies for
lewd acts at party
Says he enjoyed performance

Toxic discharges in area

*Take time to think
before you swallow
the 'findings'*

WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

Re-evaluating milk: Still a role

*The city
has taste*

11/4/91

When big brother cheats big brother

Fear, seamy thrills

threats adapt to new roles

Text has room

outlook skids to 'negative'

concerns

Worst of the year are named

Elimination of holy days

Women, as referred to by men

Other People's Money

The middle-of-the-menu blues

They're still on that pork diet

A masterful potboiler

and a gallant one at that

should shock area into action

Maybe it seems like I'm flailing, but wait until I really give up.
Look in both directions, then get hit.
Efficiency straddled culture, making obscene grunting noises.

I like songs about death and taxes. I believe in myself
but then again, I voted. Don't order me around,

be passive aggressive. Welcome to the casinos.
Will you please put me down? I'm not sure how to interpret
the fact that you piss me off. A positive self-image is one thing
but thinking he's Jesus is going a little far. One hundred percent

partial. Mothers who steal their daughters' boyfriends.
Stop stepping on my replicas. Overstimulated, underfed,

confused to the point of dissolution, Martha began to imagine
the lives she was living in alternate universes

and quit med school for waitressing. Pick your favorite title:

"These Foolish Things," "Hell In A Handbasket,"
"Less Is More But You're Still Out Of Credit." It's just air.

Either he's afraid of his own shadow, or everything is terrifying.

Even after years of therapy, I can't tell

if I prefer pleasure or pain. Is that a poem
or a urinal? Being precocious,

I fucked up my life early. You can't get there
but you're not here either.

If I'm testing you, what am I doing to myself?
What do you say we jump off the deep end?

This may be projection, but I think you're projecting.
Talk for five minutes about one of the following:

wine, football, or fashion. That three-headed dog
looks a lot like a three-headed dog. He may be a bogus shithead
but he has excellent taste. Pop songs

and bottles of pop, Pop sure was a funny fellow,
he's always popping off, my tire popped.
If passion and warmth aren't your approach, sardonic negativity

can get you over. Competitive oligarchy or petty authoritarian regime;
you be the judge. Darby's been dead for fifteen years
but he'd like to try some new songs tonight. Those radioactive boils

are probably a bad sign. If you're going to mock me
at least be unfair. Why aren't you on my side;
I thought you were honest. Don't ever get your face between his

and a pane of glass. You may need a truck
to haul my insecurities. Next stop indifference.
Any band that could consider changing its name to "The Junkies"...

There are two ways to look at it
but they're both wrong. The truck dragged me a hundred yards
and low self-worth finished the job. The agendas

stood huddled outside the door, complimenting each other
and glancing furtively towards the courtroom,
hoping soon to get redress, but in the meantime willing

to do what it took to stay in the public eye. Doughnuts,
bagels, plastic cups of orange juice and coffee.
Nice suit. It makes sense to end at this point.

We've got our own boats to hoe.
First you rub it off, then you rub it in. You're the next
contestant on "The New Price Is Being Exported
To Take Advantage of Third World Labor." I've got them eating

through my hand. Zombie this, zombie that.
Junior Varsity, Junior League, Junior's getting big enough
to beat the shit out of dear old Dad. I want to be unacceptable
even to the unacceptable. Start a new movement again.

Thankfully my non-existence is still
a problem for you. How quickly the cheer
became a chore. Opening a door in her head,
Cynthia began bifurcating, pieces of herself occurring

at oddly occasional instants aware of being filler,
until her discomfort gave way
to feelings of special freedom, which pissed her off so intensely
then she went back to Kansas and never left again.

It's time we recognized time is a construct.
She may be self-referential
but he's not everything she isn't. It's in the bag
so let it out. Have you noticed

that with all the product choices you have, you still never find
something for the man who doesn't want anything.
I've always hated Alexander Pope, but since Byron liked him
I wish he'd had the chance to die young too.

what will soon be advertising techniques. Only an act of will
keeps me from kissing everyone. It's one of those days
when objects lack all solidity. Hypocrisy
claims to have nothing to do with it. Some of these coupons

turn out not to be coupons. Now that I've undermined identity
you want to get to know me?
The problem used to be that old traditionalists would say
innovation was impossible, now old experimentalists
say it too. Oh sure he still sells

medication because people have no way to stop
what's coming round the mountain
when she comes as mass production. In the sea
there's lots of water. So much time,
so little to do. The next couple centuries

will be filled with speculation but I wouldn't
want to speculate. Pass me the prostration.
It's a highly sophisticated disease
and only drinks the finest wine.
If you were just a little more vicious, I'd be

in love with you. We have met the enemy, and they are us.
He's not standing in place, he's going backwards.
Steve broke up with Kate for ideological reasons.
You look good in your self-destructiveness. Hey, isn't this exit
the point of no return? If standing in line

gives me a chance to practice patience, then what does politics
in the art world have to do with my migraines?
Put yourself on the list of things I have no clue about.
Slowly driven into a corner, anxious beyond his years,
finding that fate was a cruel taskmaster with a sinister laugh,

subject to panic attacks and stomach problems,
Terry accepted the burdens of the coming millennium
with fragile resilience and a deeply ambivalent sense
of the value of irony. If I calculate correctly—
we're completely fucked. I need my help

but I'm not going to get it. Oh my god I've been anticipated
by that stupid art critic guy. Rimbaud, Baudelaire,
so many other French poets thought they could make great art
by pushing consciousness to the edge, but I can go out of my mind
without being interesting at all. Your offer sounds okay

but how come my hair is standing on end? I'm not bitter,
I just find perversity more intriguing than group endeavor.
First you call me a whore, then you ask me why
we never spend time together? Your paper is well-organized
but emotionally obscene. I feel important

now that I've got this pager on my handlebars.
You've got the style down pat, all you need now
is something to say. Once I realized that no matter what I said
no one would listen, I knew I finally had an angle.
Re-enlist today. Famous last words: something good

has got to come of this. Doubt, or a pair of shorts
two sizes two small? Am I menacing or just immature?
It's not the principle, it's the money.
Because she's smart, she freaks out
effectively. The affair wasn't satisfying

but at least regrets piled up. All I want to do
is get this over with, and make myself look good in the process.
Avant garde males as the aesthetic walking dead.
I'm shutting the black bag. My goal
is to clear the room of people
in the know. Invest a poem with desire

or give your resources to the nearest middleman?
Even bankers look defensive. Hang around me long enough,
your best lines become mine. Losing out
or buying in? He sucked error like a pacifier
and stole my diapers too. If this poem
starts to show emotion, we'll all be in tears.

He's just a sad clown, crying through his smile.
What's the strangest thing you ever did
to make a buck? Now that we're all friends here,
tell me what you most hate about yourself. It's all generalities.
A review of anthologies by Steve Evans
has already seen right through this poem. The sky is flying

low today; let's watch heaven crush some heads.
Rod Smith said this poem is about social negativity
but he can take his hegemony and shove it.
Understanding that life is performance, she told lies constantly,
which made things for her and her lovers interesting
even after it ruined them all. Diamonds are anybody's

best friend. If the world is really upside down
then this sentence has got to have everything backwards.
In the duel, Count Orlovsky refused swords and pistols
but settled for inflammatory backroom rhetoric. It's not easy
lacking green. I don't mean to suggest you're rushing things
but do we have to pick my gravesite today?

Stop washing your hands of my obsessive habits.
Retreat don't fail me now. Angels or angles? Let's run
over it again. Keeping in mind the state of the economy,
inflation and overpopulation and other leading indicators,
we're completely fucked. Let's ride an inner tube
down the tubes. The trick with poetry

is not to care about it in the first place.
Over time I muddled my plans
to make myself more useful. Love, pleasure, joy, all these things
are part of my life, they're just not the point at the moment.
Schizophrenic, or plain smart? The neurotic personality
may go right to the top. Which would you prefer,

therapy or higher wages? The language game is knowing
which in is what or what. I finally understand why
I identify with sports heros. Let's get pastoral.
Now that I've had time to look back on it
I have no idea what was going on. Everybody lean!
Put a positive spin on the fact that all your friends

are crazy. If the unintentional connections in this poem
are a function of the limitations of my mind
I've definitely got something to worry about.
Now that she's rejected his work, he really
wants to sleep with her. Consolidate your debt, or get
even more outrageously reckless? As a love poet

John was no great shakes, but he also lacked social insight
and any understanding of the sublime. If it feels good
do it until it's no fun anymore. His reading was okay
for someone so deeply in love with himself.
Similar to traditional ballads in its compression of detail,
patterns of repeated words and evocative omissions,

it made life at the post office
seem nostalgic. What's a curator? How many anarchists does it take
to form a bureau? Now that talk has ended, communication
can't be far behind. If you're going to deal with avant garde poets
you have to be ready to chop off their hands.
I thought I had no energy before.

It comes down to the difference between experimenting
and pretending you know everything in advance. The openness
that allows one to accept multiple meanings
will get you punished in high school. The goose
outside the window disrupted the discussion

of proper citation form. What do you know, Joe?
Either there are only so many lengths a sentence can have
or I'm no Henry James. We danced all night long to wonderfully
obscure allusions. Now even paranoia
thinks it's out to get me. His drinking songs were better

than his serious attempts at verse. Forget 24 books;
I want an instant epic! How many things in your life
can be compared to mashed potatoes? Lead me down
the garden path, drop my clothes
in the waste bin, take my wallet

to the carnal house, then just maybe
you'll get that promotion. Why won't anyone call me
Mister President? Which do you prefer, folk singers
or making your own mistakes? Agendas as a modern version
of delirium tremens. Still crazy after all these fears.

The Norton Anthology isn't the best place to look
for a belly laugh. The most astonishing ugliness
is the same as the most astonishing ugliness. Bill and Buck
told me my work used the voice of authority

but I put them in their places. Leading horses to water,
or poetry as the ground of the authentic. Choose A or B:
each thing I say is by definition insufficient, or
since there's nothing outside the conditions we describe,

what I've said here is all the truth there is.
Do opposites attract, exclude, or break city ordinances?
"I like my poems open and receptive," he said
to begin the beauty contest. Now that I've taken ideas

out of my work, action is next to go.
Leaving aside the beliefs, the people, and the consequences
the whole thing was a hoot. And after he'd tried so hard
to be a consensus man. I'm not flailing

and what if I was? I always fear these win-win situations.
The sun set on another day in the empire.
Describe the one characteristic of other people
that you most love and loathe at the same time.

He was young, strong, intelligent, good-looking and paranoid.
Is bragging an art or a craft? This leaky boat
may not get us to that desert island. Credentials

or croutons? How come nobody ever says
"rich as a poet"? How many times a day
do you chastise other people in your head, and is it more

than you chastise yourself? One day I'm going to write
a horror novel called "The Bed." What piece of furniture
scares you most? As a worker in the culture industry

I figure it's important to invest in anarchy.
Since I can't handle anything, I might as well
run for office. People don't read poetry because uncertainty

is associated with punishment. My ears have
that waxy build-up again. Meteorology or martyrology?
How many despairing ex-lovers does it take

to make you duck out on street corners?
The story would have been better if you'd taken
the characters out, eliminated the plot

and written it in another language. How do I theorize
the fact that you've got this gun to my head?
Well here we are, you, me, and the being of Being.

Poetry needs new ways to critique mainstream America
but then again, I voted for Jerry Brown.
Of course you can't afford that hat, but you'll look mighty good

in debtor's prison. Have you ever noticed that trees around here
are copied from Romantic paintings? Inbred criminality
or the best training program in the state? I'm less interested

in anything this poem says than in what happens
when I finally make you angry. It's a two-way street
but both ways are on the same side. If it's funny

not to be funny, is it serious
to be funny? Just kidding. It's not the humidity, it's the heat.

Go for the married ones, they're always available.
I wrote a poem once; I hope I never feel that bad again.

Why should I be your servant when I could be your dog?
He went on much too long, but quit when it started

to get interesting. All positions are possible
so I don't take any of them. I'd like you to meet the hair
of the dog that bit me. With some essential last minute editing
he ruined the novel. Gregory did

an abrupt about face. The tone of excessive refinement
in this poem will be offputting to some.

If Harry Crosby can celebrate black magic and death, why can't I
even pay my phone bill? Well I know all that

so tell me again. Up in the air, full of hot air,
airhead, aerosol. I don't think this firing squad

cares that much about my feelings. Going for broke
or going broke? I'd like to say class differences
are acute in the avant garde, but I don't want to ruin
the party after the reading. Given a choice, I'll take
the self-righteous position. Now that it's humiliating
to see each other, let's spend all our time together.
When does the phony become the genuine?
It may have sounded like we were talking about writing

but everybody knew we were really having sex.
It's time to freak out, I mean pass out, I mean go to sleep.

Twenty-five dollar gift certificates. One guy I knew
got all the way through graduate school while eating only

at conference snack tables. On the one hand I believe
in material particulars, on the other hand

I never notice anything. My whole life has been
one great big hysterical overstatement. The innocent ones

always turn out most sleazy. I feel terrified in the morning
but that's only the start. Emotional grandstanding

brought me respect from my superiors.
I feel like I'm hallucinating

now that I've stopped taking drugs. The Sick and Twisted
Animation Festival, or an ordinary evening in Georgetown?

With some minor refinements, capitalism might be the thing
that really finishes us off. Maybe people aren't ready for freedom

but that's no excuse to give it to them.
Marriage; the culmination of love

or a bad idea gone wrong? It's a nice place to stay away from
but I wouldn't want to visit. One good police state

deserves another. Even my dogs
are going to the dogs. I'm glad you have feelings for me
but I don't have cash for your bail.

Maybe I should admit my sentimental attachment
to military funerals. What this country needs
is more literary critics in mainstream publications.

They wanted me to open up about my feelings, but I felt inhibited
by the carving knife. Work gives me stability
because stability makes me work.

A more effective argument, or simply superior firepower?
Rich or poor, we're all alike in a traffic jam.
The exotic other turns me on. The lottery,

Fumbling words? on your

city on deadly pace

is described as 'desolate'

Diverse committee of making

A liter of mucus secreted daily

Toxic train rolls

Turtles stumped by home delivery

after protesters are unchained

miseries here on schedule

1. I have gas all the time. Is it normal?

2. How do I stop snoring?

3. I sweat excessively, even when it's cold. Why?

4. I can't perform sexually. Could it be related to my medication?

Spring is high for sufferers

for It depends subject

A in for on

Shooters change

Body in area past tragedy

a new antiquity

ROB

Reasons To Fly

personals ads, job hunting and other forms of flirtation.
The goose that laid the golden egg
has hired an agent to renegotiate her contract.

To hell with this social angst, let's make beads.
Put more poets in private industry. Keep looking away
and you just might be all right. Stuck between the bankruptcy
of Romanticism and the worthlessness of structural critique,
Marcia began to confess. I've always wanted to know
why Mohammed wouldn't go to the mountain.

Life had no meaning until I got
my purple polka-dot pajamas. Only an imbecile
believes what he's saying. My hair parts naturally
because I worked on it for years. Pure metaphysics, or hell

as other people? Hearings to examine why
navy tankers were left to rust. Living in the sensual
now that my secretary handles the details. Who lost the umbrella
with that exciting floral pattern? I may be getting older
but at least you're ignoring me. Freedom will be ensured
by expanded powers for the F.B.I. "Each man kills the thing he loves"
is the perfect way to describe this poem. Whenever someone says
"that's really deep," I look to see what I'm stepping in.

How much do you want for the baby grand?
Pat Buchanan or Father Conklin?
Random acts of cruelty permeate zombie nothingness.
If the poet on stage is crazy, how do I account

for the fact that I'm listening? Does your jaw actually do that
or are you just reading a poem? There are two ways
to deliver these pizzas, but I don't know either one.
At first she didn't like it; now she really hates it.

If there are two people with my name, one intelligent,
one foolish and overbearing, and I'm the intelligent one,
how come I like the other guy better? Steve ate the cookies
but felt bad about it. The neurotic stepchildren

accosted Dana in the stairwell, demanding boundless love,
and she realized everything was starting over.
Which do you prefer, close analysis or wild parties?
Resisting the drive to exposition, I crashed my Chevy.

Irony, soap pads, or delirium tremens? Working hard is the way
to create the illusion of working hard. My god, think
of the property costs. Let's table the discussion
of the table of contents. Incisive social commentary

or masturbatory fiddling? All information at all times
drove me back to T.V. I want to flog a dead horse
then lead it to water. He's feeling good about his feelings.
On a scale of one to ten, what do you say we get out of here?
He's a cross between Alexander Pope and Ewell Gibbons.

My career goals have broken off negotiations
with my emotional needs. I want to start a poetry movement
that synthesizes and transcends all poetry that's come before
and pretty much makes me famous.
I love you as much as I love myself.

Am I really irrelevant, or are you just trying to be nice?
Several strains of post-Enlightenment ideology
have ruined another pair of pants. Hoping for an eradication
of the self, Raoul threw himself into several evangelical groups,
drank two pints of bourbon a day, hired a dominatrix,

and confused the shit out of his cousins from Portland.
She wants something and rejects it in the same instant.
I'm an expert on all the variants of the poetry
of James Whitcomb Riley, and I'm not even a Hoosier.
Dread, depression, or disinfectant? Rubens or rodents?

I'll buy that suit when I get off the rack.
If you think I'm a mess now, wait until I really let you down.
He's running out of things to forget. This poem may be formulaic
but at least it lacks originality. Self-reflexive commentaries
always try to crash these parties. I've got a big problem

7/7/92

A generation wired and ready

Sibling love play strips to bare essentials

Keep the affair at arm's length

Caught in the vicious cycle of loneliness

There are ways to shed the painful shroud of isolation

Holocaust: Interactive displays

Mother denies charge of locking son in room

cynicism, toxicity and failure inside

Japanese confirm using 'sex slaves' during war

Recipient of baboon liver transplant taking walks

Noxious fumes force evacuation

They're angry out there about prescription costs

with western civilization. Now that I thoroughly understand the limits
of this project, I'm really overwhelmed. You can make it big
but you'll have to lose that healthy attitude. Surfer dudes,
corporate lawyers, computer hackers, college professors,
the world's one huge industrial softball league.

I see your problem, Stan, now put it away.
Feeling blue on the Red Line, seeing red on the Blue Line.
Put your knees behind your head, cross your arms, sneeze, and whisper
The Battle Hymn of the Republic. I know, let's debate the meaning
of patriot. Dear diary: my most intimate feelings

are wearing mismatched socks. Approaching the finale
the plot became even more flat and banal. This is Pentagon City.
Why call on the phone when you can harass in person?
Centennials and cemeteries. Having failed, the duty of art
should be to eliminate itself. "Communication misunderstood, sir."

In my dream, the carpet made sure I knew
it was tired of being stepped on. Harry Crosby was a lousy poet
but he had a lot of money. Thank you for having me.
You can lead an asshole to paper, but you can't
make him write. Far be it from me to criticize

the members of your divine family, but you know what I mean.
I lost the P.S., but you didn't want to read it anyway.
We're here to preserve democracy, not to practice it.
Yesterday I arrested you, today we're in love.
Which do you prefer, binary oppositions

or being forced to take sides? You can lead an asshole to paper
but you can't stop him from writing. Everything settled down
once the cops left and all the moms went to detox.
When this poem started to get interesting
I threw it away. I'm not being paranoid;
poetry just doesn't want me to write it. Regular employment

can be an interesting diversion, but gets tedious
if done frequently. Why diversify our options when we could
completely part ways? If I'm writing this poem
just at the time when literature is dying, that would make
what I'm doing incredibly important, and that *can't* be true.
Occasionally Jenny felt great concern for her friends

and then they were really in trouble. Maybe I'm talking
to the sidewalk because we have lots in common. What good parts?
Now that there's a solemn moment, pop that beer can.
My most charming feature is the way I squeal
when people underpay me. A couple of the tourists
felt pretty good when they got on the elevator

but even that finally proved no defense. Would somebody please stop
burying the survivors? The concept was confused
but the execution stunk so much that everybody loved it.
Radioactivity gives my skin a beautiful healthy glow.
Nothing's so bad that something bad doesn't come from it.
Can I sit in that? The whole evening was boring

until they asked for donations.
Rambling among paramecium and other licensed survivalists,
John embraced a more centralized Texas, one
where they bred technocrats like flies
hovering around laughing gas, where the plains

opened in the distance like holes in his pockets
which his change slipped out of for joy
of demanding compulsory reaction. The swamp thing stalked us
but it was still hard to avoid the feeling
that it was just another Friday. Did you say

you have Ebola? Maybe it was only phone line fantasy
but it's still the best sex I've ever had. I'm getting so bored
I want this never to stop. Jeff fell in the vat
at the pickle factory, but couldn't tell the difference.
Don't you love these choices for long distance carrier?

I'm going to extremes to be in moderation.
Let's look at this problem from numerous angles
or maybe just go home. Desperate times call for
something we haven't got. I want my poetry to be like
getting your finger caught up your nose

when you're trying to make that key first impression.
We've come too far to go anywhere. The philosophers lined the room,
each presenting his or her conclusions simultaneously
while grabbing conference food,
but Deirdre, who had dropped the study of religion

to become a professional caterer, couldn't help noticing
an odd crack in the wall from which paper planes emerged,
gliding across the room until they floated
quietly to the floor. I'm tired of all this weariness.
Don't tell me what to do, make me do it.

Perverse obstinacy never wants to have fun
until it decides it doesn't. At the key moment
reverse your position. If we assume
that everything we know is wrong, then some of what we know
must be right. It's settled

that nothing's settled? Depending on the level of awareness
the writer assumes to exist in the audience, it's possible
to leave everything in, keep everything out,
or shut up forever. Don wants to ruin everybody's good time

so he's decided to go into poetry. You try brushing your teeth
under a picture of William Burroughs. These days I'm making
little plastic reproductions of the Eiffel Tower. Emotional freefall
or your feet sticking out at the foot of the bed? What we need

is another anthology. My most effective elegies are written
for the living. Darn those socks. Justifying the trivial
or wasting your time? You've got the right qualifications
but unfortunately, my intentions are bad. Sincere dilemma

9/24/91

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Last one out, please put off the lights

or shameless grandstanding; either way, my in-laws
were going to be pissed. There are two kinds of people;
those who say there are two kinds of people, those who criticize
easy oppositions, and those who are wondering

just what the fuss is about. Go ahead and blow us up,
just spare me the warnings. Don't doubt my motives,
ignore them. Complexity, passion, human sympathy, insight
were only some of the things David lacked, but on the other hand

he was full of ruthless egoism. I'm not done being finished.
After eliminating distance, Sharon put us far behind her.
Just another case of bad chemistry, or a real explosion?

Your work isn't simply aimless, it also lacks direction.
If he'd known you felt that way, he would have felt you sooner.
So many centuries, so little time. According to current research

dipping your head directly into the pollutants
doesn't work any faster. Beauty is truth,
truth beauty, that's all on earth you know

and all you need to know, but then again
I voted for Jerry Brown. To sum up,
numbers make no sense.

That's funny, I don't remember leaving
that door open. What's one more one world government?
Those children with strange lights in their eyes

will now sing Little Orphan Annie. Playing with fire
or burning the house down? I don't want a third term.
My conscience wears stiletto heels. I won't stand for this

but I will take it lying down. Ninety percent perspiration,
ten percent constipation. Tell me about your bodily functions.
How many Ph.D's in cultural studies does it take

to compare our lives to professional wrestling? The best parts
are never going to happen. Now that the end is in sight
I might as well stop short.

Don't mistake my despair for a genuinely bad attitude.
Combining the unsuccessful elements of several genres,
their music is stupid in a number of innovative ways.

I love it when you reproduce me. Impressive credentials
but have you sufficiently cross-pollinated? If you ever learn
to finish your sentences, you'll really have nothing to say.

A pure blast of mediation. I'm voting third party
to prove I have no power. I used to think things through,
now I just react. Just go straight to the chemical fertilizers

and skip the vegetables. If showing up is a crucial job skill
I'd better go back to bed. Let's eat

at the Cheesecake Factory. Now that I've lost weight
my pants keep falling off my face. You've got nerve

but they've got nerve gas. When I was sixteen
I realized I had this head, so I banged it against the wall.

I don't need you to disagree with me
when I disagree with myself. Now that his ideas were polished

the reason for them had passed. Win the competition
by eliminating the competition. Excellent pursuit of mediocrity.

Begging for work, or marketing a useful skill?
Let's start this ending over again. I put my life

on the line every time I don't speak openly.
Is this your new attitude, or is your finger

stuck in a socket? Now that you've got the point

let me give it to you again. Simply too caustic

to qualify as pop, it sold millions of copies.

Anybody can die for their religion, it takes a real man

to kill for it. That's an excellent analysis

of the narrative, but we're out of gas.

I'll provide the rhetoric, you fill in the details.

Someone with your talent could really mess things up.

At the absolute nadir of replaceable nothingness,
John finally felt ready to go to the party.

Now that the first one has flopped, let's discuss
doing the trilogy. Either you're for us

or you're for us. Someone else's memories
are having my good times. A tragedy of errors:

when you make so many mistakes that it's not funny.
Except for a deep sense of complicity, I feel fine.

Now even satire can only be satirized.
Our relationship is progressing, but it's still too early

to assume you're sane. I'm just that kind of misplaced agenda.
Every sentence that Pete speaks is so important

that everyone wishes it would be his last.
Life; unfolding drama, or syndicated rerun? Either you get out of here

or I'm going to surrender. Last one to leave
please turn off the lights. How'd you like to wake up as a freak

living on the edge in Dallas? Wanting to hear the other person
ramble on is an excellent basis for any relationship.

My nose hair makes me self-conscious. Oppression isn't pretty
but it pays the bills. He'd like his vacation pictures better

if there weren't so many people in them. My margin of subjectivity
was sold along with Bill's hog futures.

In another era I could have believed that this poem
would seize you directly; now, I know half my readers
won't even absorb this line, or will

in the bathroom, on the bus, or on the way to psychotherapy.
Now that the zookeepers have gone home, it's just you and me
and this artificial African veldt.

My enthusiasm might be gone, but how dare you question
my anxiety. If you show me your foreign markets one more time
I'll never suck your dick again. At last a pastoral wind

blew my hair back gracefully. Let's talk some more
about silence. This late at night
the weirdos really think they're in charge. Right here I need to avoid
the tendency to reach for a heightened emotional reaction.

Every time I get frustrated with the limits of irony
something comes along to make it seem fresh.
I don't want to get my throat ripped out
by one of those whipped curs. I'm going to take a chance

and make that leap into bartending school. But enough about me;
what new angle are you exploiting? The performance sucked
but at least there were refreshments. Why do so many poems
fail to be convincing in their last line?

If Mark Wallace did the comedy circuit, all that big hair and those sweet drinks would riot in the streets. *Nothing Happened and Besides I Wasn't There* is a series of one to six line stanzas all revamping the idea of the one-liner. But the joke is always frightening, a world where the 2x4s pounding the cat are hitting our heads and they hurt damn it, as they always make us stop and consider what we are. He is the existential joker: if Batman met the Poet and it was for real.

– Juliana Spahr

Mark Wallace's poetry is joyous, gloomy, frisky, reflective and vulnerable to a sense of the living world that he never tried to master, but to inhabit as a kind of sad old citizen, a belonger filled with longing. He loves the daily popular tunes, the ring of contemporary coinage, flashes of wry and sardonic humor, the lover's chagrin—for the sake of the human conditions they are immediacies of, but it is a music of heaven and hell he listens for in it all. The structure of identity is exploded in the form of a three-dimensional literary method in which the borders of personality, of self and nonself, are simultaneous and conflicting modes of expression. Sometimes he takes off like a reasonable lecturer who suddenly becomes demented. What an astonishing poet he is. He speaks great truths as casually as if they were lies.

– Ron Silliman

Mark Wallace demonstrates the value of writing far past the point where the instigators of social, psychological, and economic oppression wish he'd keep his mouth shut. This amazing deflection of repetitive aphorisms swirls and spirals in upon itself, fueled by the delusory aggrandizements of the insidious institutions we call contemporary existence. Wallace manages to capture what it's like to find oneself all dressed up with no place to go. This is no book for the squeamish. Buy it only if you have nothing better to do. You don't.

– Joe Ross

WARNING: The Surgeon General has determined that reading *Nothing Happened and Besides I Wasn't There* may harm your mental equilibrium, impede your ability to act as a cog, and imperil your most functional cliches.

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